

Community Dialog on Gang Activity and Revitalization  
in the Heritage/Annandale Area of Braddock District  
Braddock Elementary School  
Wednesday, June 9, 2004  
5:00-7:00 p.m.

MEETING SUMMARY

“Time for Action”

The meeting was convened at 5:07 p.m. by Sharon Bulova, Braddock District Supervisor, Fairfax County Board of Supervisor. Sharon welcomed the attendees, and extended appreciation to Cynthia Botzin, principal of Braddock Elementary School, for hosting the Dialog throughout the series in the school’s cafeteria. She reviewed the mission statement and reiterated the agreed upon rule that attending three of the first four Community Dialog meetings entitled one to vote. Supervisor Bulova reviewed the entire community dialog agenda, with brief remarks about each of the previous meetings (February 11, March 10, April 14 and May 12). She said that a slate of recommendations would be adopted at the end of the meeting and she would be asking members of the Dialog to take the lead in following through on the recommendations.

Sharon explained that the individuals scheduled to speak this evening were the ones who could “get things done at the grass roots level,” and that each would share how they have dealt with local problems and what they have accomplished. She acknowledged the presence of Fairfax County School Board Members Janet Oleszek and Steve Hunt in the audience, and announced that Chairman Gerry Connolly was delayed because of heavy traffic.

Tessie Wilson, Fairfax County School Board Member, was the first speaker of the evening. Ms. Wilson remarked that education involves all of us, even those without children. She stressed the importance of helping children and keeping the community involved in our schools. During a tour of the Braddock District elementary school libraries, Ms. Wilson discovered that there were very few books on foreign languages, with Korean language books especially difficult to find. She noted that the Korean Embassy had donated 1,800 Korean-language books to Fairfax County Public Schools and that the Korean students have been reading and sharing them with their English-speaking friends, which is a wonderful cultural experience. Ideas or suggestions about increasing books on foreign languages can be directed to Ms. Wilson. Ms. Wilson expressed great pride in the culinary arts department at Annandale High School. At one time, she had been approached by a constituent who informed her that the programs were geared too much towards education and not enough towards private industry and business. As a result of this communication, this constituent’s group and others from industry and business redesigned the culinary arts department, donating in excess of \$100K for this effort. Ms. Wilson expressed her appreciation and desire that they remain involved. Another collaborative effort of Annandale High School’s culinary arts department will be the opening of a small café for school staff, parents and others. Ms. Wilson’s next major project will be the establishment of a scholarship fund in Fairfax County.

Ms. Bulova introduced Penny Gross, Supervisor, Mason District, Fairfax County Board of Supervisors. The Mason District consists of the Baileys Crossroads-Seven Corners areas and Annandale. Ms. Gross expressed an interest to focus on the Culmore area, which, 10 years ago, was tainted with gang activity. She recalled a situation in which a father had raped his daughter, but the daughter had refused to press charges. Ms. Gross spoke of a prostitution ring that, while operating in some garden apartments in Culmore, had been discovered by a female School Resource Officer (SRO). She also pointed out that on occasion older siblings are forced to stay home to provide child care for other members of their families. The recent machete attack was cited as an example of two very clear pictures of families directly affected by gang activity, the family of the victim stating that their son was a good child who did not get into trouble, and the family of the perpetrator stating that they were aware that their son was getting into trouble, while expressing their helplessness in the situation. Interestingly, people who lived in the area of this civic association were not even aware that this had occurred and affected their neighborhood, so Ms. Gross received no calls from them.

Ms. Gross indicated that recruitment of students at the Baileys Crossroads and Culmore school complexes and library had become a serious concern, presenting real opportunities for recruiters to get hold of the children. A good relationship between the community and its police officers has developed, however, and they have been able to intervening successfully. Ms. Gross indicated that she is very pleased with all of the good things that are occurring in the Culmore area now, including the management of the gang issue. She stressed the need for more volunteers, programs, transportation and places to house the programs, transportation being the largest issue.

Ms. Bulova introduced Gerry Connolly, Chairman, Fairfax County Board of Supervisors, and former Supervisor, Providence District, which borders on Annandale. Mr. Connolly stated that we face challenges of passivity, denial and fear. Passivity sometimes creates a sense of powerlessness to change or affect our environment. Through denial, parents or friends sometimes enable inappropriate behavior by refusing to recognize that something wrong is occurring because it is difficult to believe that their children may be at fault. Mr. Connolly commented that a senior County official had once shared with him how his own son had fooled him for years by wearing appropriate clothing and bringing home appropriate friends, while he was actually going out with other individuals. Mr. Connolly questioned if we could overcome the sense of fear that something will happen to us or to our children. He presented three examples from his days as supervisor of the Providence District. First, a neighborhood was notified of a group home that was to become part of the neighborhood, which caused the community to sue the County. This was a very painful experience, as well as an unfounded threat because the property was well maintained, and there were no problems at this group home. Mr. Connolly brought someone in from another neighborhood, who had experienced something similar to discuss his experience, research, initial response, meetings and other details, summarizing that because the home was well supervised, six years later, there had not been a single complaint, and the property values did not drop.

Second, Mr. Connolly talked about a land use case where there had been considerable opposition. Neighbors thought that instead of building houses on the site, it should be the site for a library. For a number of reasons, the case was denied. The owner of the property asked for a

reconsideration of the case. He agreed to reserve space on the site in addition to the houses he wished to build. He said he would donate the space for a library. With the support of the community, the Board did reconsider the vote and approved the rezoning, which included both homes as well as a library site. Funding for the construction of the library will be on a Library Bond Referendum to be considered by the voters this fall.

Finally, with respect to crime, Mr. Connolly referred to a community in Providence, a very diverse street with nice townhouses on one end, public housing in the middle, middle-class condominiums and older property. Gang and other criminal activity had begun to overflow the neighborhood, but a high police presence provided a new sense of security. A community was created, where previously there was none, because everyone worked together to create something that no one thought could be done. Mr. Connolly noted that the Board of Supervisors has set six areas of priority, and public safety is one of them. Mr. Connolly agreed that the threat of gangs is real, but also indicated that it is not a crisis but a challenge, not only with public safety but with the children. Latchkey children are prime candidates for gang recruitment, and Mr. Connolly stressed the need to reach these children and that it is our responsibility to get involved, at the very least to change our awareness.

Ms. Bulova, as the next speaker, shared that she had been presented with a community challenge that appeared to be impossible. One concern that was repeatedly addressed at community association meetings was the issue of cut-through traffic, but another concern has been the number of individuals who are allowed to reside in one household. After being repeatedly asked this questions and what she was going to do about it, Ms. Bulova created the Community Challenges Task Force, beginning with members of the Chapel Square community, then including the North Springfield, Annandale and Lake Braddock communities. The program included an educational element where people were asked to invest some time to understand the complexity of the issue and the parameters within which the Board of Supervisors had to work. The real issue, as it turned out, was not so much the number of individuals living in the homes but the number of cars being parked on the neighborhood streets. They focused in particular on the types of vehicles being parked, which changed the character and appearance of the residential neighborhood. People suddenly felt empowered when they learned that they could restrict the most offensive looking commercial vehicles because of certain bills being considered by the General Assembly.

Before beginning the discussion part of the Dialog, Ms. Bulova introduced Tammy Reed, Community Outreach Supervisor, Communications Center, Fairfax County Police Department, who discussed a new 911 brochure, which has been written in five languages. Ms. Reed stated that there were 1.5 million 911 calls taken last year, most of which were from cell phones, and reiterated the need to disclose your location when calling 911.

Ms. Bulova next introduced Evan Braff, Community and Recreation Services, who reminded everyone that when children are left alone, they tend to get into trouble.

Ms. Bulova reviewed briefly some potential recommendations for the groups to consider. She then asked attendees to assemble in small discussion groups, reminding all participants to suggest recommendations that were realistic and attainable to be presented to the Board of

Supervisors and the School Board. She reminded everyone that following the meeting of the break-out groups, discussion leaders would read the top three to five priorities chosen by their group, and Roberts Rules of Order would be followed for the voting process.

Ms. Bulova introduced the discussion group leaders:

- Bo Tumasz
- Mark Emery, Partnership for Youth, and Fairfax County After School Network
- Carolyn Burrell, PTSA President, Annandale High School
- Allen Jones
- Rod Manuel, Principal, Annandale High School
- Captain Debi Burnett, Commander, Youth Services Division, Fairfax County Police Department

The discussion groups met for approximately 45 minutes. Ms. Bulova closed the group sessions, and each group leader shared the suggestions from his or her group.

Suggestions from each group leader are outlined below:

Bo Tumasz:

- (1) In the spirit of getting to know your neighbors, which can be very difficult because of language barriers, loss of interest and lack of time, revitalizing civic associations could be a key factor that could tie into revitalizing the community.
- (2) There are children in schools who must do community service projects for specific classes. This would be an ideal time to put the word *community* back in *community service* by ensuring that these students really do something for their community, in multiple languages, with the possibility of earning extra credit for putting community back into the schools.

Mark Emery:

- (1) The effort to reach out to your neighbors should be all-inclusive to revitalize our neighborhoods. It is important to get to know your neighbors, whether through parent coffees, welcoming of newcomers or revitalizing the neighborhood watch.
- (2) It is important to provide services to young people by putting the schools back in the community. Community services for adults can also be included, working with adults on the challenges facing children today, what skills children need to survive and an adult presence at the schools for our children. This would build collaborative relationships.

Carolyn Burrell:

- (1) Structured after-school activities, especially at the high school and middle school levels, are imperative. Establishment of a teen center in Annandale is important. The provision of transportation to and from after-school activities is crucial.
- (2) Countywide jobs need to be made available for our youth, including year-round employment.
- (3) Increased police visibility in the community is necessary, perhaps through a satellite police station in the Annandale area.

- (4) Communication of available services is necessary.
- (5) Revitalization of Ossian Hall Park, to create more areas for entertainment, athletic activities and other events, should be considered.

Allen Jones:

- (1) There could be officially designated coordinators to parents and/or citizens within the community, for example, Alcohol and Drug Services, mentors and others, who could assist with sharing available resources with the community. This person could be a community mentor or an officially trained individual, with specific training in how to approach people about problems and other issues within a family or a neighborhood.
- (2) As librarians and park people become more aware of those involved in gangs, they should not push out those at risk or in gangs, but should invite them in or reach out to them, and find a way to include them without jeopardizing others. A training program should be provided to these individuals.
- (3) More and broader programs should be offered, for example, after-school programs to assess needs, mentoring and community leadership programs in the Annandale area. There is apparently a county program that could assist with this.
- (4) A potential research project could be the gathering of information about gang-related activities to identify gaps, opportunities and resources. This information could then be shared with others.

Rod Manuel:

- (1) The creation of a countywide employment program for the entire Fairfax County area, not just a specific region, including summer employment, is important. There could be a countywide summer employment program, or perhaps year-round, for our young people.
- (2) There is a need for after-school programs, but not necessarily in the schools.
- (3) Welcome wagons should be revitalized, including both new and old citizens. Civic associations and school groups could be involved in this effort.
- (4) The community needs to be educated in exactly what we are dealing with (i.e., what is a gang member, what to do if you see something and so forth).
- (5) With regard to Ossian Hall Park, we should look at what we have and re-establish better patrolling of the Park.

Captain Debi Burnett:

- (1) The County right now is very proactive with many preventive efforts and resources throughout many agencies within the County. To better serve the community to deal with the gang issue, there needs to be a coordinated well thought out plan, in other words, a coordinated council on gang prevention, to facilitate these services to families in the community.
- (2) There needs to be more community involvement, rather than dealing only with County agencies. Civic associations and faith organizations need to be strengthened. There should be more linkage between neighborhoods and services to deal with the issues in their areas.
- (3) There could be a more diverse way to deal with gangs, for example, brochures and/or posters delivered in several languages. Use the media to get the message out.

**Following are the five approved recommendations of the Community Dialog:**

**Recommendation #1:** Re-establish community associations, engaging the youth in all activities related to this recommendation. All activities related to breaking down barriers will be encompassed to promote people getting to know one another again, including, but not limited to:

- strengthening civic and faith associations;
- increasing community service, with possible school credit for participating youth;
- parent coffees;
- revitalizing Neighborhood Watch;
- outreach to newcomers (i.e., welcome wagons and other means of reaching out);
- increasing linkage between neighborhoods and services available to deal with issues affecting their area; and
- holding Braddock Nights concerts in Ossian Hall Park depending upon availability of facilities to support this activity.

**Recommendation #2:** Increase the involvement of schools in the community, thereby putting the community back in the schools and engaging the youth in all activities related to this recommendation. This recommendation will be pursued by the community, with ownership by Partnership for Youth, community coalitions and park/recreation services. Activities include, but are not limited to:

- building collaborative relationships between the community and schools at the elementary, middle and high school levels;
- increasing after-school programs;
- providing additional services at the schools for adults;
- establishing more structured activities, including, but not limited to, a teen center in Annandale, sports programs, intramural sports and other activities;
- increasing mentoring and community leadership programs, using County services as needed; and
- providing transportation to and from after-school activities, including the teen center.

**Recommendation #3:** Establish communications outreach through research and dissemination of quality information to better serve the community, especially the youth, through an awareness of all available programs and services. Ownership of this recommendation will be the Fairfax County Police Department, with other offices to be identified. This recommendation would include, but not be limited to:

- establishing a central county council, including a coordinated council on gang prevention, to facilitate services to families in the community and help them to be better prepared to deal with gangs and other issues;
- involving existing preventive efforts and resources available through many County agencies;
- providing informational brochures, posters, Web sites and other forms of communication in multiple languages; and

- providing a central telephone number, to be well advertised in multiple languages, to call for information about programs and services.

**Recommendation #4:** Establish a countywide job/employment program, focusing on the young people in the Annandale area. This recommendation will include, but not be limited to:

- providing equal opportunity employment through existing businesses in Annandale;
- providing sensitivity training to business owners and other adults, both in the private sector and countywide, to reduce and/or eliminate the exclusion of youth employment because of discrimination;
- changing business signage to be at least bilingual, if not multi-lingual;
- providing an opportunity for all youth to find employment, including those who might not have the capacity to do so; and
- adopting and building on the school system's model of preparing for and obtaining employment.

**Recommendation #5:** Increased police presence in the community, working with the schools and other organizations and engaging the youth. Captain Jack Hurlock, Commander of the West Springfield Police Station agreed to take the lead in this recommendation.

In summary, Ms. Bulova stated that at previous meetings there had been discussion of getting our youth involved. Youth involvement in these efforts is crucial for revitalization of the community.

Ms. Bulova requested that attendees communicate how they'd like to remain involved on a red card and leave it for her to review.

Lt. Brian Boykin, Police School Liaison Commander, Fairfax County Public Schools, shared that the Gang Resistance Education and Training (GREAT) program was in the process of being expanded.

Ms. Bulova extended appreciation to all attendees and adjourned the last meeting of the Community Dialog at 7:52 p.m.